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# Articulating Regionalism through Popular Music: The Case of *Nauchami Narayana* in the Uttarakhand Himalayas

STEFAN FIOL

*As regionalism has become a politically and economically advantageous policy across much of Asia, vernacular popular music has concomitantly become an important arena for articulating and codifying shared regionalist sentiment. This article explores the reasons for the emergence of subnational regionalism within post-independence India, and its more recent resurgence since the 1990s, arguing that expansion and diversification of popular music (in combination with other media) industries have been central to these processes. Examining the case of the protest song “Nauchami Narayana” from the Uttarakhand Himalayas, the article then investigates how vernacular popular music can blend local signs of devotion and cultural identity in order to effect political change and articulate a space of regional belonging.*

IN MARCH 2006, THE Garhwali recording artist Narendra Singh Negi released the music album *Nauchami Narayana* just months before the state assembly elections in Uttarakhand, a regional state in the Indian Himalayas. The title song of the same name, appropriating formal and stylistic features from regional spirit possession ceremonies (*jāgar*), sharply satirized the two national political parties in India, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), for their mismanagement of Uttarakhand since the regional state was first formed in 2000.<sup>1</sup> The Congress-led regional government responded aggressively, censoring the video album, restricting Negi's opportunities to perform the song publicly, and releasing its own parodies of the song. While it is difficult to measure the effects of a single song on a complex political environment, “Nauchami Narayana” became the best-selling song in the history of Garhwali-language popular music within a couple of months of its release, and most analysts agreed that it was a major factor contributing to the defeat of the Congress party in the elections (Juyal 2006; Kazmi 2006).

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<sup>1</sup>Prior to November 2000, Uttarakhand (consisting of the administrative divisions of Garhwal and Kumaon) was considered the hill district of India's most populated state, Uttar Pradesh.

This article explores the shrewd combination of spiritual and political signs within this protest song that served to galvanize regionalist sentiment in Uttarakhand. Yet this song is also symptomatic of a broader shift towards musical and political regionalism in India, fueled by the growth of urban migration and by the privatization and expansion of media industries. While some scholarship has demonstrated the ways that Hindi film music is constructed around regional tropes (Arnold 1990; Marcus 1993), little work has addressed the role that vernacular-language popular music plays in regionalist political settings.<sup>2</sup> Section one of this paper offers historical background on the spread of regionalism in India, section two discusses the role that popular music has played in its diffusion, and section three explores the struggle between Negi and the Uttarakhand state to appropriate culturally intimate signs as a means of evoking regionalist sentiment.

Much scholarship in the social sciences and humanities has focused on the mechanisms by which many forms of political and cultural nationalism are constructed, sustained, and resisted (Hobsbawm 1992; Smith 1998). Regionalism—and the terms commonly associated with it, including provincialism, particularism, and parochialism—is often positioned within this literature as either (1) a primordial, more or less “natural” unit of identification based on preexisting ethnic, linguistic, religious, or cultural identifications (e.g., Embree 1985); (2) an incipient stage of as-yet-unrealized nationalism (e.g., Chandra, Pandey, and Mathur 1976); or (3) a constructed political identity that must be controlled and sublimated in order for nationalism to function properly (e.g., Keenan 2003; Park 2005). This research begins with the premise that, in the Indian context at least, regionalism and nationalism have emerged as parallel and mutually sustaining cultural and political constructs (Applegate 1999; Chatterjee 1993; Daniotto 1996; Hobsbawm 1992; Wigen 1999).

Vernacular-language popular music is an ideal field in which to demonstrate this point, because the processes of producing, distributing, and consuming it necessitate crossing cultural, geographical, and stylistic boundaries between the region and nation. For decades, recording artists from Uttarakhand and many other North Indian regions have traveled to Delhi recording studios to construct songs in tandem with plains-based producers and sound engineers. The commodified songs that have ultimately circulated among regional listeners are syncretic musical products, featuring vernacular texts, forms, and instrumentation, but retaining many influences of an urban production process that was controlled by the state-owned media until the 1980s. As I argue below, this music has

<sup>2</sup>Manuel's work (1993) was among the first to critically examine the uses of popular music in regional political contexts. He emphasized regional attachments within India, suggesting that Hindi film music has been one of the few domains in which most Indian citizens feel connected to the nation.

generated widely shared sentiments that have been used to advance the cause of political regionalism in Uttarakhand and many other parts of South Asia.

A number of ethnographies have demonstrated that popular music has been central to the process of evoking and naturalizing nationalist sentiment, both as a weapon for state-driven propaganda and for resistance to the state.<sup>3</sup> Many of the insights drawn from this literature are helpful in understanding popular music's impact on regionalism as well. Whether disseminated via the mass media or live performance, popular music signifies in large part through unconscious, non-linguistic signs that are deeply embodied in the individual (Meintjes 1990; Turino 1999). At the same time, popular music tends to be consumed collectively, engendering feelings of group solidarity in particular spaces and times. Musical styles often blend distinct cultural influences in order to appeal to the widest cross-section of the population possible; in this manner, musical style may become iconic of the nation and/or the region (e.g., Lockard 1998; Scruggs 1999; Turino 2000). From another perspective, musical styles may be engineered to call attention to specific religious, ethnic, or cultural identifications to the exclusion of others. The density and variability of meanings inherent in popular music, allowing it to alternately represent or alienate social groups at both subjective and inter-subjective levels, are central to its effectiveness as a vehicle for regionalist and nationalist sentiment.

### SUBNATIONAL REGIONALISM IN INDIA

The relative paucity of scholarship on regionalism may be attributed to the term's semantic breadth and multiple scales of application (O'Brien 1999; Rafael 1999, 1208–10). In cultural terms, regionalism often refers to any attempt to assert or delineate ethnic, racial, class, caste, religious, or linguistic homogeneity within territorial constraints.<sup>4</sup> Bernard Cohn has defined regionalism broadly to encompass "the conscious or unconscious development of symbols, behaviors, and movements which will mark off groups within some geographic boundary from others in other regions for political, economic, or cultural ends" (1987, 119). In political terms, regions may delineate national, supranational, or subnational spaces; many political scientists and economists have espoused theories of regionalism to account for processes that occur above, beyond, or under the state.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Averill (1997), Meintjes (2003), Moore (2006), Moorman (2008), Schade-Poulsen (1999), Stokes (1993), Turino (2000), Waterman (1990), and Yano (2002).

<sup>4</sup>Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal (2003), mirroring a broader anthropological tendency, advocate a non-specific concept of regionalism that mediates relationships between "the global and the local."

<sup>5</sup>"New Regionalism" is a term used to describe a range of modes of governance and new state-society relationships, encompassing national processes of decentralization, subnational regionalism, transnational trade agreements, and "the potentially conflicting goals of democratic governance,

Important as such processes undoubtedly are to understanding the economic and cultural conditions of the twenty-first century, this article retains the more conventional and circumscribed focus on regionalism as a *subnational* process that is intricately intertwined with nationalism and the modern state. The political history of Indian federalism can be interpreted as a continuous effort to balance regionalist and nationalist interests. The same holds for other large countries that have experimented with some form of federalism, such as Russia, Australia, Brazil, Canada, and the United States, where attempts to integrate the plethora of geographic areas and cultural groups into the nation-building process necessitated the constitution of political regions or provinces.

Yet India's relationship to regionalism has also been rather unique. India was born in 1947 out of a regionalist sectarian conflict resulting in partition, and the question of how to resolve internal regionalist disputes was arguably the most important one facing the government over its first decade. One of Jawaharlal Nehru's first tasks as prime minister was to force the accession of five hundred-plus princely or native states, most of which had maintained a considerable degree of cultural and political autonomy within the Mughal and British empires. Another task was to decide whether the administrative provinces haphazardly delineated under the British Raj would continue to yield effective governance within an independent Indian nation. Nehru was wary of regionalist demands threatening national unity, but he also expressed his openness to eventually considering the formation of new regional states on the basis of linguistic homogeneity.<sup>6</sup> The senior statesman Potti Sriramulu, who in 1953 fasted unto death in support of forming a separate Andhra state for the Telugu-speaking population of the erstwhile Madras Presidency, forced Nehru's hand on the issue. Soon after this incident, the state of Andhra Pradesh was established, and in 1954, Nehru set up the States Reorganization Commission (SRC) to consider other potential regions. The recommendations of the SRC, headed by Fazal Ali, led to the formation of fourteen new states and six centrally administered territories, formally installing regionalism as a fixture in India's political landscape.

Although one aspect of regionalism has to do with the organization of the political machinery of the state to ensure administrative expediency, it is more fundamentally a process of delineating and maintaining social boundaries between in-groups and out-groups through a repertoire of shared practices and sentiments. As Nehru understood well, regionalism was a double-edged sword for the Indian state. On the one hand, state-sanctioned regionalism offered minority

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economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and social equity" (Scott 2009, 3; see also Walters and Warner 2002).

<sup>6</sup>Ironically, the internal division of the Congress party along linguistic lines since the 1920s may have presaged the movement towards linguistic regionalism in the country following independence. See *Congress Linguistic Provinces Committee Report of 1949* (popularly known as the JVC Report), discussed in Bondurant (1958, 28–32).

groups some degree of representation and self-determination in governance, and it has produced a canon of regionalist modes of performance that can be exploited by the state. Every year during the Republic Day parade in New Delhi, for example, each regional state is represented by its own float. Folkloric troupes in costume parade on and alongside the floats, performing a medley of songs and dances that seek to capture the cultural essence of each respective region. As the floats move in procession along the parade route, conforming to a highly formulaic presentational aesthetic, they collectively serve as powerful icons of both the diversity of regions and the unity of the nation (cf. Turino 2000, 15–17).

On the other hand, the reification of regional cultural identity can backfire on the state when social groups appropriate these regionalist signs to make political and economic demands or to claim outright separation from the state. Various political groups have at one time or another claimed Khalistan, Dravidistan, Kashmir, and Nagaland as homelands and sovereign states within India. Properly speaking, these must all be considered nationalist movements, but they evolved out of a plethora of regionalist aspirations. Regionalism is thus simultaneously a political project intended to consolidate state power and a cultural project aimed at mobilizing difference to attain greater degrees of autonomy within the nation (Paasi 2003). Much like the distinction Benedict Anderson made between “official nationalism” and “popular nationalism” (1983), these two modalities of regionalism support divergent interests even as they may utilize a similar vocabulary of signs and sentiments.

### **The Revitalization of Regionalism**

The formation of Uttarakhand in 2000 was part of a more recent resurgence of regionalism within the Indian political system. From 1996 to the present, the central government has been run by a series of coalitions made up of regional and constituent parties rather than a single national party, as was the trend in the decades following national independence. Moreover, the formation of Chattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Uttarakhand in 2000—all small states carved out of larger ones—marked a new approach to state policy summed up in the phrase “smaller is better” (Mawdsley 2002). This philosophy maintains that smaller political divisions will lead to more efficient regional administration and a more rapid settlement of internal disputes (i.e., they are easier to control from the center). As an indication of the continuation of this trend, the Congress party called for the establishment of a second States Reorganization Commission prior to the 2009 Lok Sabha elections to consider a number of ongoing regionalist movements.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Congress later rescinded support for this commission, but the number of regionalist movements under consideration underlines the pervasiveness of the “smaller is better” philosophy: Telengana out of Andhra Pradesh; Vidarbha out of Maharashtra; Harit Pradesh out of Western Uttar Pradesh; Bundelkhand and Purvanchal out of southeastern Uttar Pradesh; Gondwana out of parts of

Why has there been a resurgence of political regionalism? One reason may be attributed purely to political gerrymandering. With the solidification of two-party politics at the national level—the National Democratic Alliance, led by the BJP, and the United Progressive Alliance, led by the Congress party—each has alternately played the role of advocate for autonomous states in different territories as a means of gaining an advantage over the opposition. National-level politicians have gained access to vote banks by lending their support to popular regionalist movements, only to revoke this support, as often as not, once they come to power.

From a less cynical perspective, the revitalization of regionalism represents the increased participation of large sectors of the population whose interests have only recently gained visibility at the national level. The growing economic disparity between urban and rural sectors of the population, the depletion of environmental resources, and the high-profile disputes over land and water rights have mobilized local groups who have felt marginalized from state decision making (Guha 2007). Numerous regional political parties past and present—Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu, Akali Dal in Punjab, Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh, Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, and Uttarakhand Kranti Dal in Uttarakhand—have emerged to represent their regional constituencies against what they have understood to be the self-serving and exploitative interests of corporations and the central government (Basu 2005).

The intensification of ethnic and religious identities as the basis for political participation has undoubtedly also contributed to the revitalization of regionalism across the subcontinent. As has been well documented, the ascendancy of Hindu nationalist parties in the 1990s has led to greater parochialism in many regional settings (Chatterji 2009; Rajagopal 2001; Shani 2007). For example, the Maharashtra Shiv Sena has launched campaigns against Kannadigas, Biharis, and Bengalis in the name of Marathi unity; militants associated with the United Liberation Front of Assam have attacked migrant Biharis and Bengalis living in Assam; and the Akali Dal has attempted to drive non-Punjabis out of Punjab. In each of these cases, regionalism was motivated by a desire to redraw political boundaries around notions of ethnic, religious, caste, or class purity, and to reduce competition for local resources. Although none of these efforts has resulted in statehood, regional elites in Chattisgarh and Jharkhand were able to achieve statehood largely on the basis of distinct cultural and linguistic identities rooted in the reified notion of “tribes” (Babiracki 2001).

My intention is not to try to pinpoint the central motivation behind these various regionalist movements; each is a complex and evolving conglomeration

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Chattisgarh, Andhra, and Madhya Pradesh; Kodagu out of Karnataka; Bodoland out of Assam; Ladakh out of Jammu and Kashmir; Garoland out of Meghalaya; Mithilanchal out of North Bihar; and Gorkhaland out of West Bengal (Kaushish 2007).

of distinct social groups that have united under a banner of subnational statehood in order to satisfy diverse political objectives. In Uttarakhand, there were calls for statehood among elite groups as early as 1917 (Husain 1995, 36–45), and again during the reorganization of states after independence. Only in the early 1990s, however, was there what one can speak of as a mass mobilization around the idea that the plains-based government of Uttar Pradesh was exacerbating the economic and cultural decline of the mountain districts. Importantly, the rhetoric of the movement was rarely if ever couched in separatist or anti-nationalist terms. Political leaders regularly invoked Uttarakhand's legacies of military service, urban migration, and spiritual tourism in order to emphasize the region's identity as a "defender" of the national frontier; the migrant population was imagined as a kind of "umbilical cord" connecting the region to the nation (P. Kumar 2000, 112).<sup>8</sup>

A major catalyst for the Uttarakhand movement occurred in 1993 with the Mandal Commission's requirement that 27 percent of government and civil service jobs throughout the state of Uttar Pradesh be reserved for communities categorized as Other Backward Castes (OBCs), in addition to an existing requirement that 23 percent of jobs be reserved for those categorized as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Unlike the plains-based population of Uttar Pradesh, which has a large OBC population, Uttarakhand's population is predominantly higher caste (Rajput and Brahmin), and its OBC population comprises roughly 2 to 5 percent of the total population. The Uttar Pradesh government's refusal to address this discrepancy led to massive strikes and protests, eventually leading to widespread demands for statehood.

As this movement gained strength, the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal (UKD), led by Jaswant Singh Bisht, emerged as a regional political party dedicated to the formation of "an exploitationless, classless, socialist, and secular state" (Husain 1995, 148). The ruling national Congress party stood firm against the breakup of Uttar Pradesh. The national BJP, realizing the popular support for the issue of statehood, changed its earlier stand against smaller regional states forming within India. With intensive campaigning and the use of popular religious symbolism, the BJP stole the UKD's thunder, winning fifteen out of nineteen seats in the Uttar Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, and eventually leading the first state government in 2000.

My argument is that the resurgence of regionalism in Uttarakhand, and in India more broadly over the past two decades, can be attributed to the reconfiguration of center-state party politics under coalition governance, the strengthening of ethnic and religious parochial interests, and the awareness of disparities in

<sup>8</sup>Oakes (2000) discusses the official discourse in several "marginal" Chinese provinces in similar terms. He makes the compelling argument that local elites are packaging "regional cultures" as a fundamental expression of "Chineseness," and are doing so as a means of attracting transnational capital.

development between rural and urban regions. Yet each of these developments has only been possible with the expansion and diversification of media industries across the subcontinent. As I consider in more detail below, the growth of the popular music and entertainment industries has offered important venues for the state and social groups to make their regionalist claims heard. In the final analysis, regionalism has become a more legitimate political strategy because of the increased visibility (and audibility) that regionalist movements may now command through the mass media.

### REGIONALISM AND POPULAR MUSIC IN INDIA

Since the early twentieth century, when the first cylinder and disc recordings were sold in India, the music industry has attempted to establish regional markets. Hughes (2002), Farrell (1993), and Kinneear (1994) have described the various strategies taken by British-, German-, and Indian-owned companies to enlist local performers to record for their “vernacular catalogues,” and to establish lasting regional markets across South Asia. Producers, seeking ways to distinguish their products from those of their competitors, adopted regional, ethnic, and religious labels for their products, and created distribution channels that reached the remotest corners of the country. Similar to the gramophone industry in early twentieth century Shanghai (Jones 2001), foreign-owned music companies in British India were primarily interested in the expansion of their consumer base, and in some cases their recordings unwittingly facilitated anti-colonialist sentiments and political mobilization along regionalist and nationalist lines (Kinneear 1994, 61–72). This history offers a useful reminder that cultural and political expressions of regionalism are rooted in and inextricably intertwined with the potential for economic gain (Oakes 2000; Wigen 1999, 1188).

In spite of the music industry’s cultivation of regional markets, there were limitations on how much of a role popular music could play in regionalist political movements. For the better part of the twentieth century, much of the media industry was owned and operated by the state. The Gramophone Company of India (HMV) and All India Radio monopolized the airwaves and the sale of music recordings until the 1970s, effectively eliminating any media content critical of the state. Even after the decentralization of media industries and the availability of low-cost, Chinese-manufactured electronic media, the state continued to exert control over content through censorship boards and anti-piracy measures, and by being the largest patron of private industry.

Another impediment to the influence of popular music on regionalist politics has been the geographic distance between centers of production and consumption. For example, when the Uttarakhandi recording artist Narendra Singh Negi composed the album *Uttarakhandyu Jāgo* (“Rise Up, Uttarakhandis!”) in the

early 1990s in support of the growing Uttarakhand movement, he received warnings from his superiors in the government office where he was employed to abstain from any further involvement. Rama Cassette Company, a Delhi-based private music company that had produced many of Negi's earlier albums, was also resistant to the idea of a protest album, but for different reasons. The producers were far enough removed from the political activity in the mountains that they remained unconvinced of the widespread support and commercial potential of such an album. While the company did eventually agree to release the album, they refused financial support for production, forcing Negi to fund it himself.<sup>9</sup>

In recent decades, however, there are signs that popular music is playing an increasingly important role in political regionalism across South Asia. As Peter Manuel has noted, explicitly political songs, produced both in support of and against the state, are a regular part of election cycles (1993, 195). Regional political parties continue the long-established practice of hiring dramatic troupes and recording artists for political rallies; the artists are provided with lyrics, commonly set to well-known traditional, patriotic, or film-based tunes, that honor one political party while satirizing the other (Srinivasan 2007).

The degree to which politics and regional entertainment industries have become intertwined is supported by the growing number of entertainers running for political office. South India's political context has a long and well-known history of involvement with films and film stars (Baskaran 1981; Dickey 1993).<sup>10</sup> A rising number of popular singers are also entering politics, pointing to the growing importance of regional popular music in the political landscape. Renowned Bollywood playback singer Bhupen Hazarika has been a political force in Assam for decades. In Uttarakhand, Pritam Bhartwan, a popular recording artist and hereditary healer in *jāgar* rituals (described below), contested but failed to win a seat in the 2007 Lok Sabha elections. In the Lok Sabha elections of 2009, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party in Tamil Nadu fielded the poet and singer "Nagoor" E. M. Hanifa as the candidate in Vaniyambadi; and in Bengal, Kabir Suman, a Kolkata-based modern Bengali singer-songwriter and guitarist who recorded a protest album entitled *Nandigram*, was elected as a member of Parliament.

Popular music is also playing a critical role in regionalist movements where states have not been formed. This influence may be attributed primarily to the expansion of available media technologies used for musical production and consumption. The effectiveness of cassette and video media in fomenting regionalist

<sup>9</sup>Personal communication, August 13, 2005.

<sup>10</sup>The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party in Tamil Nadu continues to campaign with the fifty-year-old song hits of film star M. G. Ramachandran, who became chief minister of the state from 1977 to 1987. And the film star Chiranjeevi recently became a member of the legislative assembly in Andhra Pradesh and formed his own regional party, the Praja Rajyam.

and nationalist sentiment has been noted in a range of contexts, from the Ayodhya controversy (Deol 2000; Manuel 1993) to the Khalistan movement (Pettingrew 1992). Internet websites offer especially fertile ground for these movements because they may partially circumvent the censorship of the state and attract support among migrant and diaspora populations by integrating a range of nationalist signs (e.g., flags, images of martyrs, anthems).<sup>11</sup> Television, long understood as a core medium for nationalist propaganda in India, has been an important means of communicating regional musical styles and regionalist political concerns to a (trans)national audience (Lutgendorf 1990; Mankekar 1999; Rajagopal 2001). This was evident during the televised Indian Idol competition in 2007, for example, when the victory of Prashant Tawang from Darjeeling offered regional elites an unexpected forum to rearticulate their regionalist demand for the formation of a Gorkhaland state (Denyer 2007).<sup>12</sup>

In terms of musical production, the affordability of sound-recording technology, the lowering of import duties, and the expansion of community radio have enabled more localized popular music scenes to emerge in regional urban centers around the country. In Kohima, Nagaland, the opening of a music retail outlet and the state government's establishment of a Music Task Force to help bring training and exposure to young musicians have been touted as signs of resiliency and newfound stability in a region long plagued by ethnic violence (Ganguly 2008). In rural villages, too, home recording studios produce low-budget albums that address political and social issues of local significance. In contrast to the eight-song album format favored by urban music companies, these grassroots-funded albums may include unorthodox combinations of poetry, slogans, anthems, storytelling, and song. Because these albums tend to circulate through unofficial channels, they may elude detection by state officials.

Despite the expansion of musical production centers, the vast majority of regional popular music continues to be recorded by migrant musicians in one of the large-scale music industries in Indian cities. In recent decades, urban migrant communities in Kolkata, Chennai, Mumbai, and Delhi have grown to support very large regional music industries. While conducting research on Uttarakhand's music industry in Delhi, I came into contact with migrant musicians from various parts of North India who were constantly traveling between rural villages and the regionally segregated neighborhoods of East Delhi, utilizing social networks to find work and accommodation, and to record their music. Hundreds of small-scale recording studios exclusively rented out their space to

<sup>11</sup>The importance of music to the Telangana and Khalistan movements may be appreciated by visiting <http://www.telanganamedia.com> and <http://www.khalistan.net/>. See also Axel (2001).

<sup>12</sup>The protest songs of the northeastern states may be especially effective in reaching a (trans)national audience because of their use of popular musical styles originating in the West (e.g., rock, heavy metal). For example, the band Imphal Talkies n' the Howlers has drawn inspiration from the Beat Poets to compose music in protest of the regime in Manipur and the murders blamed on the NSCN (IM) (Laishram 2009).

teams of producers, music directors, session musicians, and lead vocalists from Maithili-, Bhojpuri-, Nepali-, Rajasthani-, Punjabi-, and Uttarakhandi-speaking areas. These musicians catered to different audiences, and thus were not in direct competition with one another; nevertheless, they operated in the same milieu and influenced one another's performance styles. Several session musicians I interviewed in Delhi studios were able to demonstrate codified singing and drumming styles that in their opinion represented and belonged to distinctive regions. In the actual practice of studio recording, however, the close working relationship of musicians from a variety of regional backgrounds has resulted in considerable overlap of the rhythmic patterns, instrumentation, and singing styles on vernacular-language albums recorded in Delhi.

In order to record music albums, Uttarakhandi artists transgress both the geographical and stylistic boundaries of the region. They must travel to plains-based studios and work with non-Uttarakhandi sound engineers, producers, and musicians, and they must rely on certain sonic conventions in the studio that were developed outside of the regional soundscape. The distance that separates so many recording artists and consumers from their mountain villages no doubt intensifies the outpourings of longing, nostalgia, frustration, and spirituality found in so many songs. For many, these transgressions are symptomatic of a broader regional experience of cultural and economic marginalization: the "raw" cultural materials of mountain villages—music, dance, dress, and poetry—are exported to plains-based recording studios, only to be edited, packaged, and distributed back to retailers in the mountains and in the urban migrant communities in the form of commodities that primarily benefit plains-based companies.

Yet these boundary-crossings can also be advantageous to migrant artists. Cultural products developed in the urban plains have larger budgets and significantly more cultural capital than those produced in the mountains. Moreover, regional singers' experiences of traveling between Uttarakhand and Delhi—between the region and the heart of the nation—allows them to act as cultural intermediaries, choosing the sounds and themes that may be understood as authentically regional and articulating the desires of regional and national belonging. The cultural and geographic separation between Delhi and Uttarakhandi villages, once an impediment to producing regionally relevant popular music, has more recently become a catalyst for generating regionalist sentiment.

### **Building Regionalist Sentiment through Popular Music in Uttarakhand**

If regionalism entails processes of political and cultural boundary making within the nation, regionalist sentiment is the mechanism by which these processes acquire force and ultimately consent. Despite a variety of attachments to place at other scales (e.g., *gaon*, *grām sabhā*, *patti*, *tehsil*, *mandal*), artists and public figures have long articulated modes of feeling and thinking in an effort to unite inhabitants as Uttarakhandis. The need to forge regionalist sentiments at this level was particularly evident in the early 1990s, when cassette

albums, radio broadcasts, pamphlets, and newspaper articles created a groundswell of support for the formation of a separate Uttarakhand state by decrying the corrupting influence of plains-based governance through land-grabbing schemes and self-serving politicians (A. Kumar 2011). After state formation in 2000, the semiotic work of the mass media has been no less central in sustaining emotional attachments to the idea of Uttarakhand, which in turn has provided legitimacy to the regionalist political aims of the state. The pervasive condemnation of “the plains” as the source of economic marginalization and cultural dependency in Uttarakhand, despite (or because of) the vagueness and slipperiness of this concept, has been pivotal to this process of galvanizing regionalist sentiment (Moller 2003).

How exactly does the popular music of Uttarakhand evoke regionalist sentiment? This is accomplished through the use of a set of culturally intimate signs that have come to stand for a shared experience of belonging to the region. Commercial video compact discs (VCDs), for example, are sold under the label “Uttarakhandi *git*” (“songs of Uttarakhand”), and the album covers depict images of the singers against a mountainous backdrop (see figure 1). Many



**Figure 1.** Narendra Singh Negi, Meena Rana, and the impersonated Chief Minister Narayan Datt Tiwari on the Uttarakhandi Video CD *Nau-chammi Narayana*.

songs utilize melodies and rhythms that are specifically employed during dance-song performances at village festivals; linguistic phrases that are shared across a range of Garhwali and Kumaoni dialects; and particular musical instruments, dresses, and bodily ornaments that are evocative of cultural performances in the central Himalayas.<sup>13</sup> While any viewer would acknowledge that the depictions are idealized, and any listener would acknowledge that the soundtracks are fabricated, the music album is nonetheless a powerful expression of cultural unity and pride. I have witnessed these albums being played in the homes of migrant Garhwali families in Delhi or immigrant Garhwali families in Toronto with the intention of informing the younger generation about the cultural traditions of Uttarakhand.

One of primary ways that commercial songs stir up regionalist sentiment is through the use of devotional forms and content (Moller 2003, 248–52; Rangan 2000). Sentiments of spirituality or devotion are of course not unique to popular music in Uttarakhand; they are present in the vast majority of South Asian popular culture in some form or another. These songs nevertheless emphasize distinctly regional signs of devotion, even if these do overlap with the listener's spiritual attachments at local, national, or transnational levels. The official slogan propagated by the Uttarakhand Tourism Department, for example, is *Dev Bhūmī* or “Land of the Gods” (incidentally, this slogan is also used by the government of Himachal Pradesh). On several occasions I have heard this slogan used in song texts and juxtaposed with the (unofficial) characterization of the Indian plains as *Rāksha Bhūmī*, or “Land of the Demons.” These labels relate to localized mythologies about mountain-dwelling gods being disturbed by demons from the plains, but they also conform to a broader regionalist narrative in which the purity of the Himalayas is corrupted by plains-based systems of governance and economics.

One of the ways in which devotional sentiment is regionally enacted is through possession ceremonies called *jāgar*, in which healers “awaken” (from the Hindi verb *jāgna*) gods, goddesses, and a range of other divine entities who then speak and dance through the bodies of their human mediums. Possession ceremonies are not unique to Uttarakhand, but *jāgar* is a widespread and distinctive form of ritual in which the vast majority of Uttarakhandis participate, regardless of where they reside. The effectiveness of *jāgar* as a vehicle for regionalist sentiment also has to do with the ambiguous position of the ritual form vis-à-vis mainstream Hinduism. *Jāgar* is generally performed in homes or open courtyards rather than temples; healers typically come from lower-caste communities rather than the majority Rajput or Brahmin communities; rituals usually involve animal sacrifice, a taboo practice in orthodox Hinduism; and the rituals

<sup>13</sup>See Fiol (2011) for a discussion of the musical and cultural feedback between village-based and studio-based performances in Uttarakhand.

involve the overlapping of local and regional deities (e.g., forms of Bhairav and Devi) and orthodox, Brahmanical deities (e.g., Nagaraja, Shiva).

One of the signs that *jāgar* has become a more acceptable vehicle for regionalist sentiment is the plethora of regional commercial recordings that now utilize the form (Fiol 2010). While cassette recordings made by ritual healers began to appear on a small scale in the 1980s, the appropriation of select stylistic and formal elements of *jāgar* has become a much more widespread characteristic of regional popular music, particularly on VCD albums released since 2000. The song “Nauchami Narayana,” which I will examine now in some detail, is a useful illustration of this phenomenon.

#### “NAUCHAMI NARAYANA”: A SPIRITUAL-POLITICAL SATIRE

In a region long dependent on state-run media and a migrant economy, there has been very little Uttarakhandi popular music coming from Delhi that has been overtly critical of the government. For this reason, the release and unparalleled influence of the song “Nauchami Narayana” took many by surprise. The song was written and performed by Narendra Singh Negi, who is Uttarakhand’s best known and commercially most successful singer. In 1977, Negi began performing on state-owned All India Radio for the *Uttarāīnī* mail-in request program from Lucknow, and later for the station in Najibabad, where broadcasts reached the far corners of the central Himalayas. Since the early 1980s, Negi has traveled to Delhi to record a cassette album nearly every year, cementing his position as the most prolific regional singer-songwriter of his generation. Given his popularity across the region, it is remarkable that Negi has, until very recently, always been a semi-professional musician, deriving his primary source of income from government service. Negi worked for the *Samāchar Vibhāg* (News and Information Division) of the state government between 1973 and 2005, which gave him valuable opportunities to travel and expand his knowledge of music and language across the mountains of Uttarakhand, but also restricted his ability to express himself openly through his music (see above discussion of the album *Uttarakhandyu Jāgo*).

It is thus not surprising that Negi wrote his most politically confrontational song, “Nauchami Narayana,” shortly after his retirement in 2005. At the time of writing the song, he was serving as an advisor on the Congress government’s Regional Culture Committee, which was headed by the chief minister of Uttarakhand, Narayan Datt Tiwari. Negi explained to me that his experience of frustration with Tiwari’s inaction on proposed recommendations in the areas of cultural policy was part of the motivation to produce a song critiquing his administration. By this time, Negi had established his reputation in the music industry as a dependable profit-maker, and he had little trouble convincing Rama Cassette Company to produce the album. The timing of the release of the album, just

months before the state assembly elections of 2007, reassured Rama's producers that there would be a demand for the album and a return on its investment. Indeed, the album sold 50,000 copies in its first week and became a permanent fixture at the election rallies held by the opposition parties (Kazmi 2006).

The biggest reason for the song's influence, in my opinion, was the way that it artfully combines regionalist sentiments of devotion with political satire. The song title, "Nauchami Narayana," references a popular name for the Hindu god Krishna, Narayana, dancing to nine rhythms (*nau chāmī*); it also conveys the feeling of naughtiness often associated with Krishna. Significantly, the title is also a double entendre on the name of the incumbent chief minister, Narayan Datt Tiwari. The VCD presentation of this song,<sup>14</sup> released shortly after the cassette album, reinforces this play on words by featuring an actor resembling Tiwari wearing a government uniform and cap while playing the iconic flute of Lord Krishna (see figure 1). The video opens with the tongue-in-cheek statement that "all characters are imaginary and resemblance to any individual is purely accidental." Yet if the meaning of the cassette's verbal puns have been restricted to Garhwali and Kumaoni speakers, the meaning of the VCD's visual doubling of the chief minister and Lord Krishna is clear even to non-Uttarakhandis.

This conflation of divine ruler and temporal ruler is more than an isolated satirical gesture. In the central Himalayas, as in many other parts of South Asia, the phenomenon of "divine kingdoms" ruled by godly kings and/or royal deities is well established.<sup>15</sup> In the territory that was once the kingdom of Tehri Garhwal, for example, Galey (1991) notes the interconnectedness of Lord Badrinath (an avatar of Vishnu) and the Maharaja of Tehri. More than sixty years after the abolishment of princely states, many residents of Tehri continue to call the descendant of the last Maharaja by the title *Bolanda Badri*, or "mouthpiece of Lord Badrinath." In many other parts of the central and western Himalayas, gods and goddesses continue to own land and rule over their polities with a full administrative retinue of ministers (*wazīr*), warriors (*khūnd*), and mediums (*paswa, mālī*) (Sutherland 2006).

With the development of democratic modes of postcolonial governance, and the corresponding expectation that politics and religion should occupy separate domains, there has been a tendency to separate the functions of *devtas* from those of living rulers (Berti 2006). Likewise, it has become more difficult for rulers, appointed through the modern electoral system of the modern state rather than through royal lineage, to legitimize their rule through a connection to the divine (although some may look to establish such a connection through mediumship, sponsorship of large-scale possession ceremonies, or participation

<sup>14</sup>Negi, Narendra Singh. *Nauchami Narayana*, Rama VCD (105), 2006.

<sup>15</sup>See Dirks (1993) for a historical perspective on this concept in South Asia, and Sax (2002) for an overview of divine kingdoms in the central Himalayas.

in royal pilgrimages). Yet this erosion of the “divine kingdom” concept, and the separation of roles for gods and politicians, has also opened up new spaces for artists to make political critiques. For instance, the Keralite temple tradition of *poorakallai* singing in praise of Krishna has been exploited by regional politicians eager to satirize their opponents (Kurien 2009).

In the case of “Nauchami Narayana,” Negi parodies this human/divine ruler relationship and adapts several features of *jāgar* to make his political critique. Most obviously, the tripartite form of the song follows the overall progression of the *jāgar* ritual: a beginning section invoking multiple gods (*dhūnyāl*), a middle section narrating the story and describing the physical attributes of one particular god in order to bring about possession (*lehri/raunsi*), and a concluding section in which the gods dance (*mannān*). In the opening phrase of the first section (see lyrics below), Negi invokes a series of nested spaces, allowing the listener to “zoom in” from the cosmos to the national and finally the regional landscape: Jambudweep (the universe) to Bharatkhand (India), Bharatkhand to Uttarakhand (see lyrics below). On the VCD, Negi is shown wearing the traditional vest and cap of a hereditary healer while playing the *daunr* drum in front of an altar, flanked by an accompanist playing the *thālī*.<sup>16</sup> As Negi acknowledges the sacrifices of martyrs in the Uttarakhandi movement, their photos appear on screen. Negi then surveys the seven-year political history of Uttarakhand, criticizing the former BJP-led government of Nityanand Swami and Bhagat Singh Kosiyari for “sleeping without conscience,” and sarcastically praising the Congress party government of “Narayana.”

The musical style of this section closely follows the initial *dhūnyāl* section of a *jāgar* ritual; up-tempo, monotonous recitation is accompanied by a short, repetitive percussion pattern. The raised tonal inflection of the *hūrka*, a pressure drum also played during *jāgar* rituals, is faintly audible over the high-pitched string melody played on the studio synthesizer and the periodic reverberation of a conch shell, signaling a devotional setting. At the end of each stanza, a male chorus holds out the elongated vowel “aa,” replicating a common feature of *jāgar* performance called *baunr* in Garhwali, and *hebār* in Kumaoni.

Negi intended the middle section of the song to resemble a *bājūband*, an informal, unaccompanied song genre performed in pastoral mountain settings. A distinctive feature of *bājūband* is that the first line of text is semantically irrelevant but sets up the rhyme and meter for the second line of text. The text mockingly praises the god-man Nauchami Narayana, while images of the blue-skinned Krishna cross-fade against clips of the impersonated chief minister playing the

<sup>16</sup> *Daunr-thālī* and *hūrka-thālī* combinations are used to perform indoor *jāgar* rituals in Garhwal. The *daunr* is an hourglass-shaped drum struck by hand on the left drumhead and by a thin stick on the right drumhead; the drum is placed between the knees in a squatting position, and variations in pressure applied to the bracing produce subtle pitch variations. The *thālī* is a circular copper or brass plate turned upside down and played with two thin wooden sticks.

flute and dancing with women in the garden of his Dehradun residence.<sup>17</sup> One of the most comical passages of the video depicts the chief minister indiscriminately handing out “*lāl batīs*” (literally, the “red flashing lights” mounted on cars that signify officialdom); Negi is exposing the Congress government’s notorious practice of conferring VIP status on low-level officials through government handouts.

In the final call-and-response section of the song, the pretense of satire fades. The chief minister is directly criticized for having resisted the movement for regional statehood, for depleting the state treasury, and for being out of touch with the needs of his hill-dwelling constituency. The video album, released several months after the cassette version of the song, referenced its own social impact through a series of newspaper headlines, one of which was titled “An Earthquake Unleashed from One Song.”

“Nauchami Narayana”<sup>18</sup>

[Section 1: *Dhūnyāl*]

Within Jambudweep is Bharatkhand, within Bharatkhand is Uttarakhand

Here the story of Uttarakhand state is related:

First of all I honor the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for the state of Uttarakhand.

The first king of Uttarakhand was enthroned from the BJP Shah dynasty—Swami Shah.

Swami Shah and his courtiers ruled for two years. What did they do?

They enjoyed themselves, praised themselves, and doubled their salaries.

They turned Uttarakhand on its head and christened it “Uttaranchal.”<sup>19</sup>

They garlanded themselves and slept without conscience.

In 2002, the conch shells and trumpets resounded for the first elections.

The public let Swami Shah and Bhagat Shah sleep on

And transferred the throne to the Chandra dynasty [Indian National Congress].<sup>20</sup>

The public began to hope and dream of improvements, of employment, of development, of a colorful future—dreams and more dreams . . .

<sup>17</sup>This not-so-subtle allusion to Tiwari’s notorious womanizing foreshadowed his eventual downfall as a politician. After losing the election in Uttarakhand, Tiwari became Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in 2007, but was sacked in 2010 following the release of a sex video showing the 86-year-old in a sex romp with three young women. This scandal rejuvenated the popularity of “Nauchami Narayana,” which has sold over 900,000 copies (Gusain 2010), and at the time of this writing has more than 370,000 viewings on YouTube.

<sup>18</sup>I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Gokaran Bamrara and Datta Ram Purohit in translating many vernacular idioms used in this song.

<sup>19</sup>Uttaranchal was the official name of the state between 2000 and 2006; it was endorsed by the BJP party over the protests of many regional activists. In a final move to regain the sympathies of the voters, the Congress party changed the name to Uttarakhand—a name that has considerable popular appeal and historical precedence—in its final months in power in 2006.

<sup>20</sup>Negi’s description of the BJP as the “Shah dynasty” and the Congress as the “Chandra dynasty” is a historical reference to the medieval Chand and Panwar dynasties (the latter adopted the title “Shah” from Mughal contemporaries) that ruled Kumaon and Garhwal, respectively, between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries CE. It might also be a reference to two primordial lineages of Rajputs (Kshatriyas), the solar (Soma or Surya) and lunar (Chandra). By using these titles, Negi is alluding to the sub-regional biases of leaders from Garhwal and Kumaon, who are notorious for favoring their constituency and neglecting the other.

So then, brothers and sisters  
 India's first king of the Chandra dynasty was Nauchami Narayana  
 Nauchami Narayana, who resembles Lord Krishna, the King of Dwarika  
 Who is the most politically savvy  
 Who has lived through many [4 × 20] spring seasons  
 Who has the pride of youth and wealth  
 Nauchami Narayana, the connoisseur of beauty and flowers

[Section 2: *Bājūband/Lehri*]

[*Refrain*]

Incarnation of Kal Yuga, Nauchami Narayana  
 Lord Krishna of Uttarakhand, Nauchami Narayana  
 Dazzler of Dwarika, Nauchami Narayana  
*Tile Daru Bola Re*, Nauchami Narayana

*Gülerā ki gārī, Narayana*

Though long opposing the demand for a separate state  
 The seat [of power] was too attractive to resist

[*Refrain repeated*]

*Sonū tolāi tolāi, Narayana*

The perks you give to VIPs  
 are like the offerings [liberally thrown to your accompanying deities]  
 [*Refrain repeated*]

*Bhūjī katī tarkārī, Narayana*

You allow the looting of the state treasury  
 with both hands, Nauchami Narayana.

[*Refrain repeated*]

*Hisārā ki gondī, Narayana*

You solve the problems of [carry across the Puranic River *Baitarini*]  
 of your biographers [those who flatter you]  
 [*Refrain repeated*]

*Gorikhyū ki gorikhyānī, Narayana*

How far can an old man carry Uttarakhand's future?  
 [*Refrain repeated*]

[Section 3: *Mannan*]

*Cham, cham, cham, chamle*

Harassing the opposition . . . *chamle*

Distracting the courtiers . . . “ “

Amusing the officers . . . “ “

Charming the public . . . “ “

Playing the flute of politics while lying down

[*Refrain repeated*]

*Cham, cham, cham, chamle*

In flat Dehradun [in the plains] . . . *chamle*

The court is established . . . “ “

In an imitation capital<sup>21</sup> . . . “ “

An army of cunning courtiers . . . “ “

<sup>21</sup>This is a reference to a longstanding movement on behalf of the regional UKD party (of which Negi is a strong advocate) to shift the state capital from Dehradun, a city located in the southern plains of Garhwal, to Gairsain, a mountain town on the border between Kumaon and Garhwal.

An army of cunning courtiers enjoying their wealth  
 [Refrain repeated]

“Nauchami Narayana” deftly manipulates devotional and political content by juxtaposing the imagined greatness of divine rule with the lived ineptness of human rule. Significantly, the song evokes regionalist sentiment without opposing nationalist sentiment: Uttarakhand is located within Bharatkhand (India), and the video shows the Indian flag alongside photos of martyrs from the Uttarakhand movement. Nevertheless, Negi effectively stokes up sentiments of frustration with the “cunning courtiers” in “flat Dehradun” who are out of touch with the desires of the mountain-based population. The figure of N. D. Tiwari is a kind of metonym for the plains-hills tension that exists in the region; he is a native of Kumaon, but he established his political career in Delhi and opposed the formation of Uttarakhand before later accepting the position of chief minister of the state.

Because *jāgar* performances have often been a forum for religious expression blended with political critique, Negi was able to use *jāgar* style, form, and instrumentation in “Nauchami Narayana” to articulate regionalist political dissent. A comparable instance occurred in the early 1980s on national Independence Day, when former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhandi native H. N. Bahuguna organized a *jāgar* in the middle of Old Delhi’s popular shopping area, Chandi Chowk. Although some of the details of this performance are unclear,<sup>22</sup> Bahuguna apparently organized the performance as a means of protesting the Emergency rule of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Several months earlier, Bahuguna had resigned from his post as general-secretary of the Congress party in order to make way for the prime minister’s son, Sanjay Gandhi. His protest was thus likely driven as much by personal animosity as it was by a sense of loyalty to those whom he felt were being oppressed under Emergency rule.

Bahuguna’s performed text drew upon the duality of temporal and divine rule manifested in the figure of Indira Gandhi, who was, on the one hand, praised for bestowing fertility upon the nation in the avatar of Indira *Bhavānī* (a title for “goddess”), and, on the other hand, critiqued for generating sterility in the nation in the avatar of Indira the prime minister.<sup>23</sup> Demonstrating the adaptability of ritual signs within *jāgar*, Bahuguna’s text replaced ritual invocations of the *Ashta Bhairav*, guardians of the goddess who protect the eight cardinal points of the village, with an invocation of four leaders protecting the four corners of Hindustan. He subtly chastised the “flatterers of the mistress”—appropriating a vernacular phrase used in *jāgar* to signify the subservient deities’ flattery of the Devi—to

<sup>22</sup> My understanding of this event is entirely based upon an article by the anthropologist Claus Peter Zoller (1985), who based his account on a description of the performance by an eyewitness. I am grateful to William (Bo) Sax for directing me to Zoller’s article.

<sup>23</sup> The charge of sterility has particular significance in the context of Gandhi’s Emergency campaign, which was widely criticized for a program of forcibly sterilizing the poor.

call attention to the blind obedience of Congress ministers and opposition leaders to the prime minister. Finally, instead of “sending the goddess home” (*gharbaun*) as would be appropriate during the concluding section of a *jāgar*, Bahuguna read a text invoking the presence of all the gods and goddesses, and praised Devi for allowing Hindustan to exist.

I have briefly summarized Bahuguna’s political *jāgar* from 1980 because it further reveals how Negi was able to exploit the ritual dimensions of *jāgar* to make a charged political statement in “Nauchami Narayana.” Both performances provided narratives in which a range of human and divine beings interacted within a sacred and political time-space. The parodic impact of each performance was undoubtedly enhanced by the unorthodox appearance of Bahuguna and Negi, both high-caste men, playing the hereditary roles of drummer and healer. The splitting of their subjects into mundane and divine manifestations—as Indira Gandhi/Devi and as Narayana Tiwari/Krishna—destabilized conventional tropes of statehood and divinity and opened up a rich interpretive space for the simultaneous articulation of praise and criticism. For Bahuguna, who was performing on a national stage in Delhi and on Independence Day, *jāgar* offered a quintessentially regional (and thus rather marginal and nonthreatening) vehicle through which to critique the prime minister. His performance may have been interpreted as a challenge to the legitimacy of the ruler, but it did not carry the risk of political backlash as only the migrant Uttarakhandi community would have been able to interpret its underlying layers of irony and protest. Negi’s song, in contrast, was unambiguously understood to be a frontal attack on the regional state government, using regionalist sentiment and the medium of popular music as weapons of mobilization.

### The Aftermath: State Censorship and Musical Retaliation

The regional state responded aggressively to the release of *Nauchami Narayana* attacking Negi in the press as an opportunist and as a singer past his prime. Government officials raided music shops across Uttarakhand and confiscated the original batch of video albums. When the next batch was released, state officials sent it back to the censor board in Delhi; the latter cut the title track, citing material offensive to the state. In the new version, released with censorship approval, the title track “Nauchami Narayana” was removed completely, leaving a video album with only seven of the original eight songs. Needless to say, this new version did not sell well, as consumers mainly wanted to hear the song that was causing all the controversy. Many outraged regional vendors, who were also fans of Negi’s music, surreptitiously defied state censorship by keeping the newer, censored version of the album out in front of their shops to avert the attention of the police while discretely selling concealed copies of the original VCD (reprinted and covertly redistributed to vendors) to customers who expressed interest in the album.

The Congress government was able to censor the song in other ways as well. According to unconfirmed reports, direct orders were issued with the implicit threat that any state employee caught listening to the song would be punished or fired. The government also foiled Negi's attempts to perform the song live. As most of the festivals in Uttarakhand are fully or substantially funded by the state government, Negi was repeatedly disinvited or denied the opportunity to sing "Nauchami Narayana" by government-funded agencies and NGOs. The controversy reached its height during the annual Virasat festival in November 2006. The festival organizers had decided that Negi could not be permitted to perform because at least 50 percent of their total budget came from the government and the government would revoke all support if Negi performed. Yet because of a miscommunication between the organizers and Negi, Negi came to the festival ready to perform anyway. Before thousands of Negi's loyal fans, the festival organizers had to explain that Negi would not be allowed to perform. Media outlets had been promoting Negi's Virasat performance as the first time the song would be heard live in the state capital of Dehradun, and when the performance was cancelled, many publicized it as a snub. In the ensuing days, there were massive protests culminating in the burning of effigies of the festival's organizers at the clock tower.

The UKD, a regional party formed during the movement for statehood, fueled the fire of this controversy by decrying Negi's victimization in the press (Juyal 2006). Since his initial involvement in the Uttarakhand movement, Negi had consistently demonstrated his support for the regional party. The UKD hoped Negi's song would be a prelude to a political career, and apparently invited him to run for elected office. Although he declined a direct role in politics, he demonstrated his support by performing in fifteen UKD rallies leading up to the elections on February 21, 2007. In an interview, Negi explained to me that any regional party is better than a nationalist party, whose first thought is for national development, and then only for regional development. Yet his participation did not ultimately translate into electoral votes for the UKD, as the party received only three of the possible seventy seats in the assembly, one seat less than in the 2002 assembly election.

Several weeks prior to the election, several VCDs were launched to rebuild support for the Congress government and control the damage of "Nauchami Narayana." While I found no explicit government endorsement on the packaging or in the credits of these albums, it was widely assumed that they were privately funded by members of the Congress party. Significantly, while these rebuttal albums were discreetly distributed within the region, they were produced by private companies located *outside* of Uttarakhand. One of the albums, called *Vikāsī Narayana* ("Narayana for Development"), was produced by Parakh Company from Jind, Harayana.<sup>24</sup> The title track offered a direct

<sup>24</sup>Pankhaj Mamgain, *Vikāsī Narayana: Garhwali Gitmālā*, Parakh Video CD, 2006.

parody of Negi's song, with altered pro-Congress propaganda lyrics. In the spirit of "development," the song praised the chief minister for bringing running water and electricity to villages. The video incorporated scenes of Tiwari and his ministers at rallies and official government functions. It also depicted folkloric festival dancing and students learning *tabla* and *sitar*, implicitly suggesting that Tiwari's government had supported the folk and classical arts. The recording of *Vikāsī Narayana* mimicked *Nauchami Narayana* precisely; it sounded like a digital clone, with the exception of the quarter-tone disparity between the vocal track and the instrumental tracks, which had the effect of cheapening the overall sound of the production. Whether this pitch discrepancy was an intentional stylistic decision or the oversight of a hastily produced album, it nevertheless suggested that the producers were retaliating with their own parodic imitation of Negi's song, effectively creating a satire.<sup>25</sup>

In response to the public outcry both for and against "Nauchami Narayana," Negi released another song just weeks before the assembly election called "Negi Dā Yana Git Na Laga" ("Brother Negi, Don't Sing This Kind of Song"). He wrote this song as a direct response to the state's violation of his rights as a performing artist. The song mocks the compromised position of the government employee—a position Negi knows well—who is forced by government order to ban "Nauchami Narayana" from public performance, despite secretly agreeing with the song's stance. One of the chorus lyrics translates as follows: "Brother, do not sing 'Nauchami Narayana,' we [politicians] are facing problems because of it. It is like hot milk that we can neither swallow nor spit out."

While the BJP was not spared in the scathing lyrics of "Nauchami Narayana," the party nevertheless used both this song and "Negi Dā" in its campaign rallies. Because of the song's particularly severe attack on Tiwari's Congress government, the BJP was able to hijack the song's cultural capital for its own political agenda. From my home in Srinagar (Garhwal) during the week before the election, I heard these songs on rotation nearly twenty-four hours a day, echoing across the river valley from the local BJP headquarters. The strategy appears to have paid off. At the conclusion of the assembly elections, the BJP had won an outright majority. After the election results were announced, Negi remarked, "Many people say that I was used by the BJP. But I will say that it was I who used the BJP. I took advantage of the stage provided and sang against the saffron brigade."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>Thomas Turino (2008) theorizes such examples of musical appropriation in political contexts as "creative indexing" to highlight the intentional evocation and manipulation of past indexical associations in new performance contexts.

<sup>26</sup>"Nauchami Narayana II Released," *Garhwal Post*, January 29, 2007, <http://younguttaranchal.com>, accessed on March 15, 2008.

## CONCLUSION

This confrontation between Narendra Singh Negi, the Congress government, opposition parties, and music companies revolved around a desire to manage and appropriate the sentiments of regional belonging in the interests of generating capital and political allegiance. With the success of “Nauchami Narayana” (and “Negi Da”), Negi illustrated the extent of the influence that vernacular-language popular music can have in shaping public opinion and impacting the political process. The government of Uttarakhand displayed a Gramscian mixture of coercion and consent through the suppression of public performances, the censorship of recordings, and the covert funding of parodic, propagandist VCDs. While there is a certain David and Goliath quality to this confrontation, it would be too simplistic to celebrate Negi as the populist singer-songwriter and denigrate the state as the oppressive power (not least because Negi also advocates a clear political agenda). Since the decentralization of the music industry in the 1970s, the state no longer has direct control over the content of popular music; in order to counter political threats and ensure popular sovereignty, it has been forced to become a direct patron of the private music industry. Moreover, the state and the music industry are not monoliths, but collections of individuals with divergent interests and oppositional tendencies. The political influence of “Nauchami Narayana” was ultimately contingent upon this variegated social and ideological terrain. Regardless of whether popular music functions as a vehicle for state propaganda or for resistance to the state, the broader point is that it has become a critical field in which regionalist sentiment is both produced and disseminated.

Over the past decade, regionalism has reemerged as a potent political formation in India because of the politicization of ethnic, religious, caste-based, and linguistic identifications, because of the short-term benefits to politicians who support regionalist movements, and because of widening economic disparities between urban and rural areas related to the growth of urban migration. All of these factors in turn have contributed to and have been shaped by the expansion of regional media industries. Vernacular-language music industries centered in Indian cities must appeal to both village and urban migrant listeners, and therefore balance content that is considered authentically regional with content that is considered foreign, but also, paradoxically, cosmopolitan and desirable. Musical recordings such as *Nauchami Narayana* articulate sentiments of belonging to a region that most insiders and outsiders consider to be spiritually endowed as well as politically and economically impoverished. These sentiments are prominent in many regionalist and nationalist contexts worldwide, yet they may have particular resonance in South Asian settings where state power and divine power have traditionally been fused in the concept of the divine kingdom. *Nauchami Narayana* satirizes this relationship, utilizing the regional

idiom of *jāgar* as a means of illuminating the incongruity between the illicit behavior of politicians and the idealized behavior of the gods.

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